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E S S A Y

ON THE
CHARACTER,
MANNERS, and GENIUS
OF
W O M E N
IN DIFFERENT AGES.

Enlarged from the French of M. THOMAS, *H* *(old)*

By Mr. R U S S E L L.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N

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P R E F A C E.

“ *F*ENELON has left us a
“ *treatise on the education*
“ *of women. Since his time, o-*
“ *ther authers, more or less cele-*
“ *brated, have written on the*
“ *same subject; and there is still*
“ *room for a treatise on female*
“ *education. But to supply that*
“ *want is not the immediate de-*
“ *sign of this piece: the Author*

A a 2

“ here

“ here only presents an historical
 “ picture, an assemblage of facts
 “ and observations, which may
 “ serve as the elements of a didac-
 “ tic work. It will perhaps shew,
 “ that women are susceptible of
 “ all the qualities which religion,
 “ society, or government, would
 “ chuse to assign them.”

After the foregoing preamble,
 M. Thomas proceeds to tell us,
 that this Essay must be considered
 as part of a History of the Manners.
 Viewed in that light, it is perhaps
 the most complete performance hi-
 therto published; and it is indis-
 putably

putably the most elegant, and most philosophical treatise, on the female mind and female character.

But, notwithstanding these excellencies, it appeared to the Editor to want a good deal more than translation to make it satisfactory to the English reader. The sentences were often complicated, and the paragraphs tedious. It had none of those larger divisions, which are so necessary to relieve the mind, nor any of those inferior ones, which are not less essential to the perspicuity of reasoning. He therefore in some measure decomposed it: he split the sentences, broke the para-

paragraphs, and divided the work into parts and sections: he omitted some things, and added others. What relates to the progress of society in Britain is entirely new. In short, he is answerable for the defects of the Essay, as it now appears; though he has not the vanity to claim its beauties. Those who are acquainted with the original, however, he doubts not will give him credit for his labours.*

* His omissions consist only of such things as seemed foreign to the subject, and which can only interest a Frenchman, and a lover of *éloge*.

C O N-

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ERRATA. — P. 72. l. 7. for *Epinina* read *Epo-
nina*. Ib. l. 10. for *put to death*, read *drove
to despair*.

E S S A Y
ON THE
CHARACTER, MANNERS, and GENIUS
OF
W O M E N.

PART I.
Of the WOMEN of Antiquity.

INTRODUCTION.

IF we take a survey of ages and of countries, we will find the women — almost without exception — at all times, and in all places, adored and oppressed. Man, who has never neglected an opportunity of exerting his power, in paying homage to their
B beauty,

beauty, has always availed himself of their weakness. He has been at once their tyrant and their slave.

Nature herself, in forming beings so susceptible and tender, appears to have been more attentive to their charms than their happiness. Continually surrounded with griefs and fears, the women more than share all our miseries, and are besides subjected to ills which are peculiarly their own. They cannot be the means of life without exposing themselves to the loss of it. Every revolution which they undergo alters their health, and threatens their existence. Cruel distempers attack their beauty—and the hour which confirms their release from those,

those, is perhaps the most melancholy of their lives. It robs them of the most essential, and, in some respects, the most endearing characteristic of their sex. They can then only hope for protection from the humiliating claims of pity, or the feeble voice of gratitude.

Society, instead of alleviating their condition, is to them the source of new miseries. More than one half of the globe is covered with savages; and, among all those people, women are completely wretched. Man, in a state of barbarity, equally cruel and indolent, active by necessity, but naturally inclined to repose, is acquainted with little more than the physical effects of love; and

having none of those moral ideas, which only can soften the empire of force, he is led to consider it as his supreme law, subjecting to his despotism those whom reason had made his equals, but whose imbecility betrayed them to his strength.

“ Nothing ” (says professor Millar, speaking of the women of barbarous nations,) “ can exceed
 “ the dependence and subjection
 “ in which they are kept, or the
 “ toil and drudgery which they
 “ are obliged to undergo. —
 “ The husband, when he is not
 “ engaged in some warlike exercise, indulges himself in idleness, and devolves upon his
 “ wife the whole burden of his
 “ domestic affairs. He disdains to
 “ assist

“ assist her in any of those servile
 “ employments ; she sleeps in a
 “ different bed, and is seldom per-
 “ mitted to have any conversation,
 “ or correspondence with him.*”

The women among the Indians of America are what the helots were among the Spartans, a vanquished people obliged to toil for their conquerors. Hence, on the banks of the Oroonoko, we have seen mothers flaying their daughters out of compassion, and smothering them in the hour of their birth. They consider this barbarous pity as a virtue.

* Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society. See also Colben's Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope. *Histoire Generale de Voyages*, liv. 14. chap. 3. sec. 4. Sale's Voyage to North America.

“The men” (says Commodore
 Byron, in his account of the in-
 habitants of South America,) ex-
 “ercise a most despotic authority
 “over their wives, whom they
 “consider in the same view they
 “do any other part of their pro-
 “perty, and dispose of them ac-
 “cordingly : even their common
 “treatment of them is cruel ; for
 “though the toil and hazard of
 “procuring food lies entirely on
 “the women, yet they are not
 “suffered to touch any part of it,
 “till the husband is satisfied ; and
 “then he assigns them their por-
 “tion, which is generally very
 “scanty, and such as he has not
 “a stomach for himself †”

† Byron's Narrative.

Among

Among the nations of the East, we find another kind of despotism and dominion prevail — the seraglio, and the domestic servitude of women, authorised by the manners, and established by the laws. In Turkey, in Persia, in India, in Japan, and over the vast empire of China, one half of the human species is oppressed by the other.

The excess of oppression in those countries springs from the excess of love.

All Asia is covered with prisons, where beauty in bondage waits the caprices of a master. The multitudes of women there assembled have no will, no inclinations, but

his. Their triumphs are only for a moment; and their rivalry, their hate, and their animosities continue till death. There the lovely sex are obliged to repay even their servitude with the most tender affection; or, what is still more mortifying, with the counterfeit of an affection which they do not feel: There the most gloomy tyranny has subjected them to creatures, who, being of neither sex, are a dishonour to both: There, in short, their education tends only to debase them; their virtues are forced; their very pleasures are involuntary and joyless; and, after an existence of a few years—till the bloom of youth is over—their period of neglect commences, which is long and dreadful.

In

In the temperate latitudes, where the climate giving less ardour to passion leaves more confidence in virtue, the women have not been deprived of their liberty; but a severe legislation has at all times kept them in a state of dependence. One while they were confined to their own apartments, and debarred at once from business and amusement; at another time, a tedious guardianship defrauded their hearts and insulted their understandings. Affronted in one country by polygamy, which gives them their rivals for their inseparable companions; enslaved in another by indissoluble ties, which often join the gentle to the rude, and sensibility to brutality; even in countries where they may be esteemed most
happy,

happy, constrained in their desires, in the disposal of their goods, robbed of freedom of will by the laws, the slaves of opinion, which rules them with absolute sway, and construes the slightest appearances into guilt; surrounded on all sides by judges who are at once their tyrants and their seducers, and who, after having prepared their faults, punish every lapse with dishonour—nay usurp the right of degrading them on suspicion; who does not feel for the tender sex? Yet such, I am sorry to say, is the lot of women over the whole earth. Man, with regard to them, in all climates and in all ages, has been either an insensible or an oppressor; but they have sometimes experienced the cold and deliberate

berate oppression of pride, and sometimes the violent and terrible tyranny of jealousy. When they are not beloved, they are nothing; and, when they are, they are tormented. They have almost equal cause to be afraid of indifference and of love. Over three quarters of the globe, nature has placed them between contempt and misery.

“The melting desires, or the
 “fiery passions,” says professor
 Ferguson, “which in one climate
 “take place between the sexes,
 “are in another changed into a
 “sober consideration, or a patience
 “of mutual disgust. This change
 “is remarked in crossing the Me-
 “diterranean, in following the
 “course

“ course of the Mississippi, in ascend-
 “ ing the mountains of Caucasus,
 “ and in passing from the Alps and
 “ the Pyrenees to the shores of the
 “ Baltic.

“ The burning ardours and the
 “ torturing jealousies of the fe-
 “ raglio and the haram, which
 “ have reigned so long in Asia and
 “ Africa, and which in the south-
 “ ern parts of Europe have scarce-
 “ ly given way to the difference of
 “ religion and civil establishments,
 “ are found, however, with an
 “ abatement of heat in the climate,
 “ to be more easily changed, in one
 “ latitude, into a temporary pas-
 “ sion which ingrosses the mind,
 “ without enfeebling it, and which
 “ excites to romantic atchieve-
 “ ments:

“ments: by a farther progress to
 “the north, it is changed into a
 “spirit of gallantry, which em-
 “ploys the wit and fancy more
 “than the heart; which prefers in-
 “trigue to enjoyment; and sub-
 “stitutes affectation and vanity,
 “where sentiment and desire have
 “failed. As it departs from the
 “sun, the same passion is farther
 “composed into a habit of do-
 “mestic connection, or frozen into
 “a state of insensibility, under
 “which the sexes at freedom
 “scarcely chuse to unite their so-
 “ciety †.”

Even among a people where
 beauty received the highest ho-

† Essay on the History of Civil Society,
 part iii. sec. 1.

mage, we find men who would deprive the sex of every kind of reputation. "The most *virtuous* woman," says a celebrated Greek†, "is she who is least talked of."

That morose man, while he imposes duties upon women, would deprive them of the sweets of public esteem; and, in exacting virtues from them, would make it a crime to aspire at honour.

If a woman were to defend the cause of her sex, she might address him in the following manner.

"How great is your injustice!
"If we have an equal right with
"you to virtue, why should we

† Thucydides.

" not

" not have an equal right to
 " praise? The public esteem ought
 " to wait upon merit. Our duties
 " are different from yours; but
 " they are not therefore less dif-
 " ficult to fulfil, or of less conse-
 " quence to society: they are the
 " fountains of your felicity, and
 " the sweeteners of life. We are
 " wives and mothers. 'Tis we
 " who form the union and the cor-
 " diality of families; 'tis we who
 " soften that savage rudeness which
 " considers every thing as due to
 " force, and which would involve
 " man with man in eternal war.
 " We cultivate in you that human-
 " ity, which makes you feel for
 " the misfortunes of others; and
 " our tears forewarn you of your
 " own danger. Nay, you cannot
 " be

“ be ignorant, that we have need
 “ of courage not less than you.
 “ More feeble in ourselves, we
 “ have perhaps more trials to en-
 “ counter. Nature assails us with
 “ sorrow, law and custom press us
 “ with constraint, and sensibility
 “ and virtue alarm us by their con-
 “ tinual conflicts. Sometimes also
 “ the name of citizen demands
 “ from us the tribute of fortitude.
 “ When you offer your blood to
 “ the state, think that it is ours.
 “ In giving it our sons and our hus-
 “ bands, we give more than our-
 “ selves. You can only die on the
 “ field of battle, but we have
 “ the misfortune to survive those
 “ whom we love most.

“ Alas!

“ Alas! while your ambitious
 “ vanity is unceasingly labouring
 “ to cover the earth with statues,
 “ with monuments, and with in-
 “ scriptions, to eternize if possible
 “ your names, and give yourselves
 “ an existence when this body is
 “ no more, why must we be con-
 “ demned to live and to die un-
 “ known? Would you, that the
 “ grave and eternal forgetfulness
 “ should be our lot? Be not our
 “ tyrants in all. Permit our names
 “ to be some time pronounced be-
 “ yond the narrow circle in which
 “ we live; permit friendship, or
 “ at least love, to inscribe its em-
 “ blems on the tomb where our
 “ ashes repose; and deny us not
 “ that public esteem, which, af-
 “ ter the esteem of one’s self, is
 C “ the

“the sweetest reward of well-
“doing.”

All men however, it must be owned, have not been equally unjust to their fair companions. In some countries public honours have been paid to women. Art has erected them monuments, eloquence has celebrated their virtues, and history has collected whatever could adorn their characters.

Without entering into circumstantial details, which might perhaps disgust by their uniformity, I shall inquire, in general, what are the qualities and the kinds of merit of which women are capable; how far government, laws, and circumstances can raise them; and shall attempt

attempt to discover the secret connections of policy with their manners. I shall then quickly examine what the women have been in different ages, and how the spirit of their times, or of their nation has influenced their character.

This Essay, if I may so speak, will be a history of that part of the human species, which the other flatters and calumniates by turns—and frequently without knowing them. For it is with women as with sovereigns, they seldom hear the truth; and we estimate them more by interest and by humour, than by justice.

I neither mean to write a panegyric nor a satire, but to make a

collection of observations and of facts ; in which may be seen, what the women have been, what they are, and what they ought to be.

SECTION I.

*Of the great and virtuous Actions of
WOMEN in general.*

WE find in the writings of Plutarch, the panegyrist and the judge of so many great men, a piece intituled, *The virtuous Actions of WOMEN*. It is addressed to one of the sex, named *Clea*, of whom we know little. But her connection with the philosopher of Chæronea alone, has been deemed sufficient, by some writers, to class her among the number of learned women.

Plu-

Plutarch begins his performance with blaming those, who would deprive women of that praise which is their due. "One might," says he, "make a comparison between " Anacreon and Sappho, between " Semiramis and Sesostris, between " Tanaquil and Servius, and between " Brutus and Portia. The " talents and the virtues are modified by the circumstances and the " persons, but the foundation is " the same; the colour and the " surface, so to speak, are only " different."

The philosophical historian next proceeds to mention a great number of women of all nations, who have given examples of their courage, and who have shewn a generous contempt of death.

He instances the Phœnician women ; who, before an engagement which threatened the destruction of their city, agreed to bury themselves in the flames, if the battle should be lost, and crowned with flowers the woman who first made that motion in the council.

He tells us of other women, who, in a city besieged, made the men blush for a shameful capitulation ;—of women, who, seeing their sons and their husbands flee in battle, ran before them, and obstructed their passage, forcing them to return, to death or to victory ;—of women, who, during the time of a siege, mounted the walls, defended their city, and bravely repulsed the enemy ;—of
wo-

women who resisted despotism and oppression, and who, as soon as the tyrant was slain, ran dancing before the conspirators, and crowned them with their own hands;—of some, who themselves gave liberty to their country;—of several, who exposed themselves to death, and loaded themselves with chains to save their captive husbands:—and he takes particular notice of Camma, who poisoned herself at the altar, that she might poison the murderer of her husband; and who, turning toward the assassin, said,

“ I have only lived to revenge
 “ the death of my spouse—It is
 “ done. Thee, this moment, I or-
 C 4 “ der,

“ der, in place of a nuptial bed,
 “ to prepare thyself a tomb.”

He likewise instances the women of Gaul, who, in the time of a civil war, threw themselves between two armies rushing to battle, and separated, and reconciled the combatants. As a reward for which act of valour, they had the honour of being admitted into the public councils, and sometimes of being chosen the arbiters of nations.

To these great and generous qualities, by which women seem to rise above themselves, Plutarch has joined the softer, and to men more attractive virtues, as being more natural to the sex. He praises the women of an island of the
 Archi-

Archipelago, where, during the course of seven years, he says, there was neither an instance of weakness in a young person, nor of infidelity in a married woman:— And he relates an anecdote of the Milesian virgins, which merits the attention of a philosopher. Multitudes fell by their own hands — doubtless in that trying age, when nature giving birth to restless and turbulent desires, inflames the imagination, and when the heart, astonished at new wants, which virtue forbids it to gratify, feels pining melancholy succeed to the sportful tranquillity of childhood. Nothing could stop the contagion. A law was made condemning the first who should be guilty of self-murder, to be brought naked, and exposed

posed in the market-place. Those young women were not afraid of death; but they were afraid of shame, even after death. Not one of them henceforth made an attempt upon her life.

Plutarch in the same piece relates another anecdote, which, even at this day, might afford an excellent lesson of political œconomy. A king, who believed that riches consisted in gold, obliged the greater part of his subjects to labour in the mines. They all perished. The remaining inhabitants of the country had recourse to the queen. She ordered an artificer to make privately the resemblance of bread, of meat, and of different kinds of fruits, of gold;

gold; and, when the king returned from a journey, she had them served up to him. The view pleased him very much; but, at length, he grew hungry, and desired to have something to eat. The queen replied,

“ We have nothing but gold.
“ Your lands are uncultivated:
“ they produce nothing. I have
“ set before you what you love,
“ and all that now remains to us
“ of a once plentiful and populous
“ kingdom.”

The king saw, and corrected his mistake.

SECTION

SECTION II.

Of the Grecian WOMEN.

BESIDES his general treatise on the actions of women, Plutarch has left us a piece in honour of the Spartan dames. There he cites a variety of expressions, which demonstrate their courage and vigour of mind; there we find beings and virtues very different from those of the same sex with which we have occasion to be acquainted:—Nature sacrificed to patriotism; honour ranked before affection; the name of citizen preferred to the name of mother; tears of joy shed over the body of a son pierced with wounds; the maternal hands armed against a son guilty of cowardice;

ice; the mandate of death conveyed to a son suspected of a crime; and sorrow, and even compassion, regarded as a weakness, or as an insult!—

He gives us a singular instance, in a Spartan woman, of intrepidity and fortitude in a state of servitude. A prisoner, and sold as a slave, the question was put to her, “What knowest thou?”—“To be free!” she replied; and, when her master commanded what she deemed ignominious, she coolly said, “You are unworthy of me:” and resigned herself to death.

Those who have not been accustomed to look beyond their own times, and who conclude what wo-

men

men have been, from what they are; and those, more particularly, who are ignorant what effects a legislation conceived in one head, and combined in all its branches, can produce on the mind, will be at a loss to comprehend, how a sex that seems rather formed for sensibility than fortitude, should possess so much courage. It sprung from the vigour of ancient laws.

Among the Greeks, who were almost all republicans, the manners of the women became necessarily bold and austere. The retreats where they spent their lives subdued their desires; the poverty of the public denied the means of corruption; and the apprehension of national honour exalted their sentiments.

timents. They had an ambition of not being behind their sons, their their brothers, and their husbands; and, not being able to attract them by feminine arts, they boldly trod in their footsteps.

Other causes co-operated to place the women of those early ages on a level with the men. In the era of the formation of states, when society is only emerging from barbarism, the toils and the dangers of the two sexes are nearly the same.

The republics, or the kingdoms of Greece, consisting often only of one city, were continually either threatened with war, or were the scene of blood. National animosities

fities, inflamed by the clashing of interests, were more ardent, and less easily extinguished than in our times. The wars of Europe are now only the means, and the manner of deciding the quarrels of princes: they were then the awakened passions of the people. The inhabitants of one state fought for the lives of the inhabitants of another. Victory condemned the women to slavery. Such a condition was an asylum against death, and might sometimes be alleviated by the favour of a master, but could never protect them from dishonour.

The uncertainty of the laws, in the particular states of Greece, and the shocks of liberty, opened a
door

door to tyrants. The right to command, was then a right to abuse it. To ascend the throne, was to be a robber and an assassin. The citizen knew not thenceforth what he had to fear, to hope, or to suffer.

The inhabitants of one place were involved in opposition and bloodshed, and those of another were engaged in dark conspiracies, where women were admitted to the mysteries, and sometimes employed as the ministers of vengeance; for the ills complained of extended to them, and they had often more to lose than their lives. The two sexes then kept pace with each other: their courage was great, because the occasions of exerting it were many and trying.

D

In

In the same periods, and from the same impulse, both Europe and Asia were over-run by invasions and emigrations of armed multitudes; and, among all those wandering people, the two sexes encountered the same hardships and the same perils. The women would therefore imperceptibly acquire a habit of fortitude;—and, as the virtue of the softer sex has its existence in pride—as indolence is almost always the companion of seduction—as the practice of surmounting dangers teaches us to subdue ourselves—as the life of those women was either altogether active, or altogether retired;—and, as they could know nothing of that anxious leisure of society, where imagination eternally

nally out-runs desire, and the soul is at once corrupted by all its senses, they would join to their courage a high and delicate apprehension of honour:—and these are, indeed, the two qualities assigned by Plutarch to the women of those early times, both Greeks and barbarians.

But, in the different eras of Grecian history, we must not suppose that the women were always the same. It appears that the manners in the isles of Greece, in general, were much purer than on the continent. Those islanders, by being less exposed to foreign intercourse, could more easily preserve their laws and their virtues. The warlike convents of Lace-

demon, the nurseries only of soldiers, would be much more rigid than the smiling retreats of Athens, whence politeness was propagated, and fashion announced; and the city of Thebes, where a rustic grossness supplied the place of an elegant luxury, must have been very different from Corinth, which, on account of its situation and commerce, obtained the name of *The Two Seas of Wealth and Pleasure*.

In proportion as their institutions were corrupted, the virtues of the women, we may conclude, were lost. But the rank which the courtezans enjoyed, even in the brightest ages of Greece, and particularly at Athens, is one of the great-

greatest singularities in the manners of any people. By what circumstances could that order of women, who debase at once their own sex and ours—in a country where the women were possessed of modesty, and the men of sentiment—arrive at distinction, and sometimes even at the highest degree of reputation and consequence? — Several reasons may be assigned for that phenomenon in society.

In Greece, the courtezans were in some measure connected with the religion of the country. The goddess of Beauty had her altars; and she was supposed to protect prostitution, which was to her a species of worship. The people in-

voked Venus in times of danger: and, after a battle, they thought they had done honour to Miltiades and Themistocles, because the Laïses and the Glyceras of the age had chanted hymns to their goddesses.

The courtezans were likewise connected with religion by means of the arts. Their persons afforded models for statues, which were afterwards adored in the temples. Phrine served as a model to Praxiteles for his Venus of Cnidus: and, during the feasts of Neptune near Elufis, Appelles having seen the same courtezan on the sea-shore, without any other veil than her loose and flowing hair, was so much struck with her appearance, that he borrowed from it the idea
of

of his Venus rising from the waves.

They were therefore connected with statuary and painting; as they furnished the practisers of those arts with the means of embellishing their works.

The greater part of them were skilled in music; and, as that art was attended with higher effects in Greece than it has ever been in any other country, it must have possessed, in their hands, an irresistible charm.

Every one knows, how enthusiastic the Greeks were of beauty. They adored it in the temples; they admired it in the principal

works of art; they studied it in the exercises and the games; they fought to perfect it by their marriages, and they offered rewards to it at the public festivals. But virtuous beauty was seldom to be seen. The modest women were confined to their own apartments, and were visited only by their husbands and nearest relations. The courtezans offered themselves every where to view; and their beauty, as might be expected, obtained universal homage.

Society only can unfold the beauties of the mind: modest women were excluded from it. The courtezans of Athens by living in public, and conversing freely with all ranks of people, upon all manner

ner of subjects, acquired by degrees a knowledge of history, of philosophy, of policy, and a taste in the whole circle of the arts. Their ideas were more extensive and various, and their conversation was more sprightly and entertaining, than any thing that was to be found among the virtuous part of the sex. Hence their houses became the schools of elegance. The poets and the painters went there to catch the fleeting forms of grace, and the changeable features of ridicule; the musicians, to perfect the delicacy of harmony; and the philosophers, to collect those particulars of human life which had hitherto escaped their observation. The house of Aspasia was the resort of Socrates and Pericles, as
that

that of Ninon was of St. Evremont and Condé. They acquired from those fair libertines taste and politeness, and they gave them in exchange knowledge and reputation.

Greece was governed by eloquent men; and the celebrated courtezans having an influence over those orators, must have had an influence on public affairs. There was not one, not even the thundering, the inflexible Demosthenes, so terrible to tyrants, but was subjected to their sway. Of that great master of eloquence it has been said: "What he had been a whole year in erecting, a woman overturned in a day." That influence augmented their conse-

consequence; and their talent of pleasing increased with the occasions of exerting it.

The laws and the public institutions, indeed, by authorising the privacy of women, set a high value on the sanctity of the marriage vow. But in Athens imagination, sentiment, luxury, the taste in arts and pleasures, was opposite to the laws. The courtezans therefore may be said to have come in support of the manners.

There was no check upon public licentiousness; but private infidelity, which concerned the peace of families, was punished as a crime. By a strange, and perhaps unequalled singularity, the men
were

were corrupted,—yet the domestic manners were pure. It seems as if the courtezans had not been considered to belong to their sex; and, by a convention to which the laws and the manners bended, while other women were estimated merely by their virtues, they were estimated only by their accomplishments.

These reasons will, in some measure, account for the honours which the votaries of Venus so often received in Greece. Otherwise we should have been at a loss to conceive, why six or seven writers had exerted their talents to celebrate the courtezans of Athens †; why three great painters had uni-

† See Athenæus.

formly

formly devoted their pencils to represent them on canvass; and why so many poets had strove to immortalize them in their verses. We should hardly have believed, that so many illustrious men had courted their society; that Aspasia had been consulted in deliberations of peace and war; that Phrine had a statue of gold placed between the statues of two kings, at Delphos; that, after death, magnificent tombs had been erected to their memory.

“The traveller,” says a Greek writer†, “who, approaching to Athens, sees on the side of the way a monument which attracts his notice at a distance, will imagine that it is the tomb of Mil-

† Dicæarchus.

“tiades

“ tiades or Pericles, or of some
 “ other great man, who has done
 “ honour to his country by his fer-
 “ vices: he advances, he reads,
 “ and he learns, that it is a courte-
 “ zan of Athens who is interred
 “ with so much pomp.”

Theopompus, in a letter to
 Alexander the Great, speaks also
 of the same monument in words to
 the following effect.

“ Thus, after her death, is a
 “ prostitute honoured; while not
 “ one of those brave warriors who
 “ fell in Asia, fighting for you and
 “ for the safety of Greece, has so
 “ much as a stone erected to his
 “ memory, or an inscription to
 “ preserve his ashes from insult.”

Such

Such was the homage which that enthusiastic people, voluptuous and passionate, paid to beauty. More guided by sentiment than by reason, and having laws rather than principles, they banished their great men, honoured their courtezans, murdered Socrates, permitted themselves to be governed by Aspasia, preserved inviolate the marriage bed, and placed Phrine in the temple of Apollo!

S E C.

SECTION III.

Of the Roman Women.

AMONG the Romans, a grave and austere people, who during five hundred years were unacquainted with the elegancies and the pleasures of life, and who, in the middle of furrows and of fields of battle, were employed in tillage or in war, the manners of the women were a long time as solemn and severe as those of the men, and without the smallest mixture of corruption or of weakness.

The time when the Roman women began to appear in public marks a particular era in history.
Before

In the infancy of the city, and even till the conquest of Carthage, shut up in their houses, where a simple and rustic virtue paid every thing to instinct, and nothing to elegance; so nearly allied to barbarism, as only to know what it was to be wives and mothers; chaste, without apprehending they could be otherwise; tender and affectionate, before they had learned the meaning of the words; occupied in duties, and ignorant that there were other pleasures, they spent their life in retirement, in nursing their children, and in rearing to the republic a race of labourers or of soldiers. Nor were they inattentive to the other parts of domestic œconomy: virtuously happy during the night, in the recess of more

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important cares, they were employed through the day in working alternately at the loom and at the spindle.

The habits of the most illustrious Romans, for many ages, were spun by their wives, or by their sisters. Even Augustus, when lord of the world, remained an example of that ancient simplicity.

The Roman women, during that period were respected over the whole earth. Their victorious husbands revisited them with transport, at their return from battle; they laid at their feet the spoils of the enemy, and exalted, and endeared themselves in their eyes, by the wounds which they had received for them and for the state. Those
warriors

warriors often came from imposing commands upon kings, and, in their own houses, accounted it an honour to obey. In vain the too rigid laws had made them the arbiters of life and death: more powerful than the laws, the women ruled their judges. In vain the legislature, foreseeing the wants which exist only among a corrupt people, permitted divorce; the indulgence of the polity was proscribed by the manners.

Such was the influence of beauty at Rome, before the licentious intercourse of the sexes had corrupted both, debasing the one by the other: and every mean it appears was used to prolong the

happy period, and preserve the purity of female manners.

A severe guardianship, from which no age relieved the unmarried women; the censure of the magistrates; the domestic tribunals; the laws for preventing their luxury, by fixing their dowries; the sumptuary laws, for regulating their ornaments; the temples erected to chastity, and to a goddess who presided over the peace of marriages and the reconciliation of spouses; decrees of the senate in favour of women who had been serviceable to the state; all demonstrate the attention which that warlike people paid to the softer sex, and to their virtues, as long as they had any themselves.

The

The Roman matrons do not seem to have possessed that military courage, which Plutarch has praised in certain Greek and Barbarian women. They partook more of the nature of their sex; or, at least, they departed less from its character. Their first quality was decency. Every one knows the story of Cato the censor, who stabbed a Roman senator for kissing his own wife, in presence of his daughter.

To these austere manners the Roman women joined an enthusiastic love of their country, which discovered itself upon many great occasions. On the death of Brutus, they all clothed themselves in mourning. In the time of Co-

E 3 riolanus,

riolanus, they saved the city. That incensed warrior, who had insulted the senate and the priests, and who was superior even to the pride of pardoning, could not resist the tears and the entreaties of the women: They melted his obdurate heart. The senate decreed them public thanks; ordered the men to give place to them upon all occasions; made an altar be erected on the spot where the mother had softened her son, and the wife her husband;—and the sex were permitted to add another ornament to their head-dress.

It is to be wished, that our modern ladies could assign as good a reason for the size of their caps.

The Roman women saved the city a second time, when besieged
by

by Brennus. They gave up all their gold as its ransom. For that instance of their generosity, the senate granted them the honour of having funeral orations pronounced from the rostrum, in common with patriots and heroes.—After the battle of Cannæ, when Rome had no other treasures but the virtues of her citizens, the women sacrificed both their gold and their jewels. A new decree rewarded their zeal.

Valerius Maximus, who lived in the reign of Tiberius, and who has left us a book which is a more singular monument of great virtues than of good taste, has several essays in praise of the Roman women. But these are less

panegyrics than detached histories, to which he has sometimes given the style and the manner of the oration. We have good reason to think so, since the celebrated Portia, the daughter of Cato, and the wife of Brutus, is not there forgot; nor that Julia, the wife of Pompey, who died of terror at seeing the robe of her husband, tinged with his blood; nor that young Roman, who, in prison, supported her father by her milk; nor several other illustrious women, who, during the time of the proscriptions, exposed their lives to save their husbands.

The same writer, in extolling the virtues, touches also on the talents of the Roman women. He
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informs us that, in the second triumvirate, the three assassins who governed Rome, thirsting after gold not less than blood, and having already practised every species of robbery, and worn out every method of plunder, resolved to tax the women. They imposed a heavy contribution upon each of them. The women sought an orator to defend their cause, but found none: nobody would reason against those who had the power of life and death. The daughter of the celebrated Hortensius alone appeared: she revived the memory of her father's abilities; and supported with intrepidity her own cause, and that of her sex. The ruffians blushed, and revoked their orders. Hortensia

tenfia was conducted home in triumph; and had the honour of having given in one day, an example of courage to men, a pattern of eloquence to women, and a lesson of humanity to tyrants.

But the era of the talents of women at Rome, is to be found under the emperors; when society was more perfected by opulence, by luxury, by the use and abuse of the arts, and by commerce. Their retirement was then less strict; their genius, more active, was more exerted; their heart had new wants; the idea of reputation sprung up in their minds; their leisure increased with the division of employments. They had servile offices, which the women of
rank

rank left—if I may so express myself—to the people: they had those of a higher class, which were soon filled. During upwards of six hundred years, the virtues had been found sufficient to please; they now found it necessary to call in the accomplishments. They were desirous to join admiration to esteem, till they learned to exceed esteem itself: for, in all countries, in proportion as the love of virtue diminishes, we find the value of talents to increase.

A thousand causes concurred to produce this revolution of manners among the Romans. The vast inequality of ranks; the enormous fortunes of individuals; the ridicule affixed by the imperial court

court to moral ideas; all contributed to hasten the period of corruption. Then vice had no curb. The excessive desire of shews brought a low and shameless freedom into fashion. Women contended with each other, who should bribe highest for the embraces of a player. They fixed their hearts and their eyes upon the stage, to devour the movements of a pantomime. A dancer, or a juggler, swallowed up the patrimonies, and gave heirs to the descendants of the Scipios and the Emiliuses. Debauchery reduced fertility. They learned to cheat nature. The art of producing abortions completed the detestable practice. The passions, always craving, always gratified; and the women tired of all,
cloyed

cloyed of all, multiplied in Rome the monsters of Asia: they mutilated their slaves, to satisfy the new caprices of an imagination jaded even with pleasure itself. The vices became more powerful than the laws. It was no longer the study of the magistrate to preserve the manners, but to punish crimes; and sometimes their number, and their nature, was so alarming, that it became necessary for public justice to cover herself with a veil: because there would have been no less danger than shame in taking notice of all the guilty.

When Septimus Severus mounted the throne, he found three thousand accusations of adultery
on

on the roll. He was obliged to lay aside his plan of reformation.

In that age, the rank of the women appears to have been more frequently praised than the virtue, and the talents, or accomplishments, than the manners.

About the beginning of the empire, several funeral orations were pronounced at Rome in honour of women: the oration of Junia, the sister of Brutus, and the wife of Cassius; the oration of the empress Livia, the mother of Tiberius; that of Octavia, spoken by Augustus; and that of Poppæa, by Nero. The first may be said to be the eulogy of virtue, still severe and repulican. The second ought
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to mark the gradation of the manners of the women of a commonwealth to their manners in a court, and under monarchical government.

The manners of Livia partook of both periods, and of both governments. She was connected with the republic by a remnant of simplicity; and, to use the words of Tacitus, "by the sanctity of her house:" She was connected with the monarchy by a boundless ambition, by a desire of reputation, by a studied deceit, by the art of happily employing the allurements of her sex—in short, by intrigue and address applied by turns to great or to trifling purposes.

The

The third oration, or that of Octavia, the sister of Augustus, the wife of Anthony, and the virtuous and tender rival of Cleopatra, was the eulogy of beauty rendered interesting by misfortunes, and mingled with great events, of which she was rather the victim than the cause.

These panegyrics might pass without reprehension; but the eulogy of Poppæa pronounced by an emperor and applauded by the Romans, was a proof of the last stage of corruption†. It seemed to insinuate, that all the women connected with the imperial house, or who entered there, had a right to be praised in the same manner after

† Tacit. Ann. xvi. 6.

their

their death. Several of them, while on the throne, were publicly abandoned in their pleasures; but the apotheosis repaired all. Religion was even less strict than the manners: it was easier to obtain the rank of a goddess, than the character of a virtuous woman.

There were still however some virtues among the Roman women; but these were remarkable. The greater part of them owed their birth to Stoicism, which, under the first emperors, spread itself to Rome. Stoicism is to the manners, what republican severity is to government. It revived in some houses the ancient virtues; but with this difference, that formerly the Romans may be said to have

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sucked

sucked in virtue with their milk; it was a kind of habitual instinct, and the happy effect of example and of laws: now, to resist the torrent of corruption, it was necessary to possess cultivated manners, firm opinions, and philosophical resources. It was likewise necessary to have principles; for cold reason could not long have held out: it was necessary to possess a certain enthusiasm, which at once animated and supported the soul; which proposed to itself a dignity superior to man, that it might elevate him to the height of his powers; which despised pleasure, that it might hate vice; which withstood sorrow and compassion, that it might fortify itself against weakness; which, in short,
in

in places where guilt was all powerful by authority and by example, where men were enslaved by all things, rendered man independent of all things—but of moral obligation; and which, raising him above this sublunary scene and all its delusive joys, made him his own censor, his preceptor, his contemplator, and his judge.

Such was the doctrine of the Stoics. It was therefore highly necessary at Rome in this period, as a powerful counterpoise to an enormous weight; and it produced, indeed, in that city the most amazing contrasts:—the most exalted courage was often found by the side of the most debasing cowardice, and the most rigid austerity

in the neighbourhood of the most shameless licentiousness.

It is worthy of remark, that Stoicism never produced such great effects in Greece as in Rome. As there is something extravagant in its nature, it perhaps requires extraordinary circumstances to give it energy. Great wants and great evils are necessary to create great virtues. Stoicism resembles those mechanical powers, which increase in proportion to their resistances.

Several illustrious Romans, nursed in this sect, displayed the virtues which it inspired: and the women, more susceptible of habits than of principles, and almost always governed by the manners,
which

which strike them more forcibly, imitated the conduct of their husbands or of their fathers. Portia had given the example. The daughter of Cato, and the wife of Brutus, she was raised to the very summit of their ideas. In the conspiracy against Cæsar, she shewed herself worthy to be associated with the first of humankind, and trusted with the fate of empires. After the battle of Philippi, she would neither survive liberty nor Brutus, but died with the bold intrepidity of Cato.

The example of Portia was followed by that Arria, who seeing her husband hesitating, and afraid to die, to encourage him, pierced her own breast, and delivered to

him the dagger with a smile†; by Arria's daughter, the wife of Thrasea, and by the daughter of Thrasea, the wife of Helvidius Priscus, both worthy of having had for their husbands men of the greatest virtue and fortitude; by Paulinia, the wife of Seneca,

† The name of Arria's husband was Pætus. The manner of their death has afforded Martial the subject of an elegant epigram; which may be thus paraphrased.

When to her husband Arria gave the sword,
Which from her chaste, her bleeding breast
she drew.

She said, " My Pætus, this I do not feel;
" But—oh! the wound, that must be made
by you!"

She could no more—but on her Pætus still,
She fix'd her feeble, her expiring eyes;
And, when she saw him raise the pointed steel,
She sunk—and seem'd to say, " Now Arria
dies!"

who

who made her veins be opened at the same time with her husband's; and who, forced to live, during the few years which she survived him, " bore in her countenance," says Tacitus, " the honourable " testimony of her love, a *paleness* " which proved that part of her " blood had sympathetically issued " with the blood of her spouse."

The same exalted virtues were displayed, though in a different manner, by Agrippina, the wife of Germanicus; who, naturally haughty and sensible, after the death of that great man, buried herself in retirement in all the bloom of youth; and who, neither bending her stateliness under Tiberius, nor allowing herself to be

corrupted by the manners of her age, as implacable in her hatred to the tyrant as she had been faithful to her husband, spent her life in lamenting the one and in detesting the other. Nor should the celebrated Epinina be forgot, whom Vespasian ought to have admired—but whom he so basely put to death.

It is remarkable, that not one of those extraordinary women had the honour of a funeral oration. But that avails little: their virtues were preserved by Tacitus. Two lines of that author are of more weight with posterity than all the panegyrics that ever were pronounced.

I do

I do not mean to speak of all the celebrated women of the empire; but Oppian, Herodian, Philostratus, and Dion, take notice of a woman possessed of a character, and a species of merit so very different from any of those that I have had occasion to mention, as to claim my particular attention. It is the empress Julia, the wife of Septimus Severus: born in Syria, and the daughter of a priest of the Sun, it was predicted, that she should rise to sovereign dignity. Her character justified the prophecy.

Julia, while on the throne, loved, or pretended passionately to love letters. Be it taste, be it a desire of knowledge, be it a desire
of

of reputation—be it all these, or be it what it may that induced her, she spent her life with philosophers. Her rank of empress would not perhaps have been sufficient to subdue those bold spirits; but she joined to that the more powerful influences of wit and beauty. These three kinds of empire rendered less necessary to her that which consists only in art; and which, attentive to their tastes and their weaknesses, governs great minds by little means. It is said that she was a philosopher. Her philosophy however did not extend so far as to give chastity to her manners. Her husband, who did not love her, valued her understanding so much that he consulted her upon all occasions. She
governed

governed in the same manner under his son. To conclude her character, empress and minister of state, occupied at the same time about literature and politics, and mingling her pleasures freely with both, having courtiers for her lovers, scholars for her friends, and philosophers for her counsellors, in the middle of a society where she reigned and was instructed, Julia arrived at the highest celebrity; but, as among all her excellencies we find not those of her sex, the virtues of a woman, our admiration is lost in blame. In her lifetime she obtained more praise than respect; and posterity, while it has done justice to her talents and her accomplishments, has agreed to deny her esteem.

After

After this extraordinary woman, we find Julia Mammæa, of the same family, and who was likewise an empress, or at least mother to an emperor. Her merit was to have united genius and valour; but, above all, to have educated for the throne her son, the young Alexander Severus, nearly in the same manner as Fenelon afterwards educated the duke of Burgundy. She made him at once virtuous and intelligent.

In following the course of history, the illustrious Zenobia, though not of Roman extraction, presents herself to view—A princess no less worthy, than happy, to have had Longinus for her preceptor; who knew as well to write as to conquer;

quer; who was afterward unfortunate with dignity; and who consoled herself for the loss of a throne, and the pleasures of grandeur, with the sweets of solitude, and the joys of reason.

All these women received high encomiums from the writers of their age; — which have since served to swell the size of all the panegyrics of celebrated women.

* We have still remaining two panegyrics on empresses: one is the panegyric of Eusebia, the wife of Constance. She was the protectress of Julian. It was she likewise who raised him to the imperial throne; and, by that secret charm

charm which wit and beauty have over even tyrants themselves, she often prevented the political cruelties of a prince, who was always ready to assassinate those whom he feared. Julian, who owed to her life and empire, composed her panegyric. His gratitude has not made him eloquent.

The other panegyric is written by Lucian: it is in dialogue, and in the form of a portrait. We do not know precisely whom it is designed for; but the commentators, who are always in confidence of such secrets, have not failed to tell us that it is the panegyric of an empress. Be that as it may, we may venture to affirm, that it is the original of forty or fifty thousand

land portraits of heroines or of princesses, which, four hundred years after, had been made in France, in Italy, or in Spain, by the orators, historians, poets, and romance-writers of those times, who frequently bestow on one woman all the perfections of the sex.

It is the first trace which we find among the ancients of that light spirit of gallantry, which is so fashionable among the moderns; and which consists in saying to women, with a warm tongue and a cold heart, all that we do not believe, and all that we would have them to believe. This rant, which is the offspring of insensibility and affectation, and which joins bombast to falsehood, owes its birth to

Lu-

Lucian; and must have proceeded from the corruption of the manners of the empire, from the levity natural to the Greeks of his time, and from some peculiarity in his own character. The head may declaim, but the heart only knows how to praise.

SECTION IV.

Of the Effects of Christianity on the Manners of WOMEN.

WE have already seen, that the revolution in the government of Rome, was followed by a change in the manners; but, towards the third century, they underwent a new and more remarkable change.

Hitherto the manners of the women had been only founded on morality, and had no connection with religious ideas. The manners had been united to the policy of some countries; but the laws had traced different lines, according to the different plans of legislation, for the commencement and termination of the virtues of women.

The dances, and the dress of the Spartan virgins, are well known. According to Montequieu, Lycurgus had murdered modesty, and chastity itself.

At Rome women had been seen to dance publicly on the stage, without the slightest veil between their nakedness and the eyes of the

G people:

people: and, if Cato retired from such a spectacle, the magistrates and the priests there attended.

The arts of painting and sculpture, which chiefly delighted in imitating nature simple and unadorned, contributed farther to seduce the imagination by means of the senses.

Philosophy had no fixed principles for women. Sometimes it combated, and would have extinguished in them, that sweet sentiment which is at once the safeguard and the charm of their sex †; sometimes it taught that the

† The school of the Cynics, which regarded modesty as a dangerous allurements, and made it a duty to banish it from society.

tender union, which supposes a perpetual contract of hearts, was only the tie of a moment, destroyed by the moment that followed †.

Religion itself was only a kind of sacred policy, which had rather ceremonies than precepts. The ancients honoured their gods, as we honour our great men: they offered them incense, and expected their protection in exchange. The gods were their guardians, not their legislators.

Christianity, which now began to spread itself over the earth, was a legislation. It imposed the most

† *Système de la Communauté des Femmes dans un Etat.*

severe laws upon women, and upon manners. It strengthened the marriage knot. To the political, it added a sacred tie; and, ratified between the bench and the altar, placed the matrimonial engagements under the jurisdiction of Heaven.

Not satisfied with regulating the actions, Christianity extended its empire even to the thoughts. Above all it combated the senses. It waged war even with such inanimate objects as might be the accomplices of seduction, or were the means of delight. In a word, rousing vice in her secret cell, it made her become her own tormentor, and condemned all the guilty to blush, by a forced confession of their weaknesses.

The legislation of the Greeks and Romans referred the motive of every action to the political interest of society; but the new and sacred legislation, inspiring only contempt for this world, referred all things to a future and very different state of existence. Hence sprung the idea of an unknown perfection.

The detachment of the senses, the reign of the soul, and an inexpressibly sublime and supernatural something, which blended itself with both, became the doctrine of a body of people. Hence the vow of continence, and the consecration of celibacy.

Life was a combat. The sanctity of the manners threw a veil over

nature and over society. Beauty was afraid to please; valour dropt his spear; the passions were taught to submit; and the severity of the soul increased every day by the sacrifices of the senses.

The women, who generally possess a lively imagination and a warm heart, devoted themselves to virtues which were as flattering as they were difficult, which were no less elevated than austere. It is almost a matter of indifference to happiness, whether high passions are to be gratified or subdued. The soul is pleased with its efforts; and, provided it is exerted, it signifies little though its activity should be turned against itself.

The

* The disciples of Christianity were farther taught to love and comfort one another, like children of the same family. In consequence of this doctrine, the more virtuous as much as the more tender sex, converting to pity the sensibility of nature, — the use and abuse of which religion taught them equally to fear, — devoted their lives to the service of indigence and distress. Delicacy learned to overcome disgust; and the tears of beauty were seen to flow in the huts of misery, and in the cells of disease, with the friendly sympathy of a sister.

The persecutions which arose in the empire soon after the introduction of Christianity, afforded

that religion a new opportunity of discovering its efficacy. To preserve the faith, it was often necessary to suffer imprisonment, banishment, and death. Courage then became necessary.

There is a deliberate courage, which is the result of reason, and which is equally bold and calm: it is the courage of philosophers and of heroes. There is a courage which springs from the imagination, which is ardent and precipitant; and such is most commonly the courage of martyrs, or the religious courage.

The courage of the Christian women was founded upon the noblest motives. Animated by the glorious
hope

hope of immortality, they embraced flames and gibbets, and offered their delicate and feeble bodies to the most excruciating tortures.

This revolution in the ideas, and in the manners, was followed by another in the writings. Such as made women their subject, became as austere and seraphic as they.

Almost all the doctors of those times, to whom the church has assigned the compound title of saints and of orators, commend to admiration the Christian women. But he who speaks of them with most eloquence, and with most zeal, is Saint Jerom; who, born
with

with a soul of fire, spent twenty-four years in writing, in combating, and in conquering himself.

The manners of this Saint were probably more severe than his thoughts. He had a number of illustrious women at Rome among his disciples. But, though surrounded with beauty, he escaped weakness, without escaping slander; and, flying the world, the women and himself, he retired to Palestine; where all which he had quitted pursued him still, tormented him under the penitential sackcloth, and, in the middle of solitary deserts, re-echoed in his ears the tumult of Rome.

Such

Such was Saint Jerom, the most eloquent panegyrist of the Christian women of the fourth century. That warm and pious writer, though generally harsh and obscure, softens his style in a thousand places to praise the Marcellas, the Paulas, the Eustochiums, and many other Roman women, who at the Capitol had embraced Christianity, and studied in Rome the language of the Hebrews, to read and understand the books of Moses.

When the Roman empire, like some venerable column, was pushed from its base, and broke in pieces by the myriads of the North, Christianity passed from the conquered to the conquerors, and almost

most entirely by the zeal of the women; who, at the same time, diffused the Gospel and softened the manners of savages.

It is observed, that the Christian women have, in all ages, been more anxious of making proselytes than the men. Whether it be that their weakness takes advantage of the sacred opinions, which are the greatest support to the soul; that their imagination, more lively, is more strongly inflamed by objects which are above nature, and sometimes even above reason; that the religious principles of men are more connected with reflection, and those of women with sentiment;—for the one, we know, has much more activity than the other;

other;—that they look upon Christianity, which reduces all conditions to a level, as a necessary defence for them, and a counterpoise to weakness against force; that, in short, their natural desire of sway, which is supposed to have no bounds, would perhaps exercise its dominion over that which is most free, over the mind itself—or whatever be their motive, the world has been obliged to their ardour.

It was women who, making the charms of their sex subservient to religion—who, raised to thrones by their beauty, drew over their husbands to their opinions, and spread Christianity over the greater part of Europe. It was by
 their

their means that France, England, a part of Germany, Bavaria, Hungary, Bohemia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and, for some time, that Persia received the gospel. By the same influence, Lombardy and Spain renounced the opinions of Arius.

I shall not here repeat the names of those princesses. They are inscribed in the barbarous annals of the times, and have since been repeated by a number of panegyrist. It is sufficient for me to have pointed out the species of merit for which they were distinguished, and on what the eulogies dwell, which they received in their lifetime, or which have been paid them by posterity.

ESSAY

E S S A Y
ON THE
CHARACTER, MANNERS, and GENIUS
OF
W O M E N.

PART II.
Of the WOMEN of MODERN
NATIONS.

SECTION I.
*Of the Inundation of the Barbarians,
and the Effects of Chivalry on the Cha-
racter and the Manners of WOMEN.*

HISTORY does not afford so
singular a revolution in po-
licy and manners, as that which
followed the subversion of the Ro-
man empire.

It

It is to the barbarians who spread conflagration and ruin, who trampled on the monuments of art, and spurned the appendages of elegance and pleasure, that we owe the bewitching spirit of gallantry, which, in these ages of refinement, reigns in the courts of Europe: and that system, which has made it a principle of honour among us to consider the women as sovereigns, which has partly formed our customs, our manners, our policy, and which has so remarkably influenced our writings and our languages—that system, which has exalted the human character by softening the empire of force, which mingles politeness with the use of the sword, which delights in protecting the weak, and in conferring that importance which nature or fortune have denied,

nied, was brought hither from the frozen shores of the Baltic, and from the savage forests of the North.

The northern nations in general paid great respect to women. Continually employed in hunting or in war, they condescended only to soften their ferocity in the presence of the fair. Their forests were the nurseries of chivalry. Beauty was there the reward of valour. A warrior, to render himself worthy of his mistress, went in search of glory and of danger. Jealousy produced challenges. Single combats, instituted by love, often stained with blood the woods and the borders of the lakes; and the sword ascertained

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the rights of Venus as well as of Mars.

Let us not be surprised at these manners. Among men who have made few advances in civilization, but who are already united in large bodies, women have naturally, and must have, the greatest sway. Society is then sufficiently cultivated to have introduced the ideas of preference and of choice in the connexion between the sexes, — which seem to be little regarded, if at all known, among savages: it is too rude to partake of that state of effeminacy, in which the senses are enfeebled, and the affections worn out by habit. People but little removed from barbarism, in the perfection of
their

their animal powers, and ignorant of all those artificial pleasures created by the wants of polished life, feel more exquisitely the pleasures of nature, and the genuine emotions of man. They mingle even with their love a kind of adoration to the female sex.

Several of the northern nations imagined, that women could look into futurity, and that they had about them an inconceivable something approaching to divinity. Perhaps that idea was only the effect of the sagacity common to the sex, and the advantage which their natural address gave them over rough and simple warriors; perhaps also those barbarians, surprised at the influence which beau-

ty has over force, were lead to ascribe to supernatural attraction, a charm which they could not comprehend.

A belief, however, that the Deity communicates himself more readily to women, has at one time or other prevailed in every quarter of the earth. Not only the Germans, the Britons, and all the people of Scandinavia were possessed of it: it was women among the Greeks who delivered the oracles. The respect which the Romans paid to the Sibyls is well known. The Jews had their prophetesses. The predictions of the Egyptian women obtained much credit at Rome even under the emperors. And in most barbarous nations,

tions, all things that have the appearance of being supernatural, the mysteries of religion, the secrets of physic, and the rites of magic, are in the possession of the women.

The barbarians, who over-ran Europe, carried their opinions along with their arms. A revolution in the manner of living must therefore soon have taken place. The climates of the North required little reserve between the sexes; and during the invasions from that quarter, which continued for three or four hundred years, it was common to see women mixed with warriors. Hence that sweet and timid modesty, which has generally been considered as essential

to beauty, by being unveiled to every eye, ceased to be regarded as a virtue.

Among the ancients, the retirement of women was a long time a part of the constitution of the state; because the government and the laws rested upon the manners. In modern Europe, the barbarians having every where concerted military establishments, paid little attention to the manners: they rested all things upon force.

By mingling with a corrupted people, who had all the vices of former prosperity along with those of present adversity, the conquerors were not likely to imbibe
more

more severe ideas. Hence we see those sons of the North, in softer climates, uniting the vices of refinement to the stateliness of the warrior, and the pride of the barbarian.

They embraced Christianity: but it rather modified than changed their character. It mingled itself with their customs, without altering the genius of the people.

Thus, by degrees, were laid the foundations of new manners, which in modern Europe have brought the two sexes more on a level, by assigning to the women a kind of sovereignty, and associating love with valour.

Nearly about the time that this revolution took place in the West, a circumstance pretty remarkable, a religion * and a people arose that established and consecrated, in the East, the domestic servitude of women: so that the same era which gave birth to the empire of beauty in Europe, doomed the lovely sex to be eternal slaves in Asia. Their slavery extended with the arms of the conquering Arabs, and their dominion and the gallantry of the North accompanied the victories of the savage, but generous inhabitants of the pole.

The reign of chivalry already commenced, began to advance over Europe. That civil and mi-

* Mahometism.

litary

litary institution took its rise from a train of circumstances, and the native bent of the new inhabitants. Its true era was the fourteenth century.

Shattered by the fall of the empire, Europe had not yet arrived at any degree of consistency. After five hundred years, nothing was fixed; nothing, if I may use the phrase, was moulded together. From the mixture of Christianity with the ancient customs of the barbarians, sprung a continual discord in the manners; from the mixture of the rights of the priesthood with those of the empire, sprung a discord in laws and politics; from the mixture of the rights of sovereigns with those of
the

the nobility, sprung a discord in government; and, from the mixture of Arabians and Christians, sprung a discord in religions. Anarchy and confusion were the result of so many contrasts.

Christianity, which had now lost much of its original influence, like a feeble curb, was still sufficient to restrain the weak passions, but was no longer able to bridle the strong. It produced remorse, but could not prevent guilt.

The people of those times made pilgrimages, and they pillaged; they massacred, and they afterwards did penance. Robbery and debauchery were blended with superstition.

It

It was in this era that the nobility, idle and warlike, from a sentiment of natural equity, and that uneasiness which follows the perpetration of violence—from the double motive of religion and of heroism, associated themselves to effect in a body what government had neglected, or but poorly executed. Their object was to combat the Moors in Spain, the Saracens in Asia, the tyrants of the castles and strong holds in Germany, and in France; to assure the safety of travellers, as Hercules and Theseus did of old; and, above all things, to defend the honour and protect the rights of the feeble sex, against the too frequent villany and oppression of the strong.

A no-

A noble spirit of gallantry soon mingled itself with that institution. Every knight, in devoting himself to danger, lifted himself under some lady as his sovereign. It was for her that he attacked, for her that he defended, for her that he mounted the walls of cities and of castles—and for her honour that he shed his blood.

Europe was only one large field of battle, where warriors clad in armour, and adorned with ribbands and with the cyphers of their mistresses, engaged in close fight to merit the favour of beauty.

Fidelity was then associated with courage, and love was inseparably connected with honour.

The

The women, proud of their sway, and of receiving it from the hands of virtue, became worthy of the great actions of their lovers, and reciprocated passions as noble as those they inspired. An ungenerous choice debased them. The tender sentiment was never felt but when united with glory; and the manners breathed an inexpressible something of pride, heroism, and tenderness, which was altogether astonishing.

Beauty perhaps never exercised so sweet, or so powerful an empire over the heart. Hence those constant passions which our levity cannot comprehend, and which our manners, our little weaknesses, our perpetual thirst of hopes and desires,

desires, our listless anxiety that torments us, and which tires itself in the pursuit of emotion without pleasure, and of impulse without aim, lead us to reject, are turned every day into ridicule on our theatres, in our conversations, and in our lives.

But it is nevertheless true, that those passions, fostered by years and roused by obstacles, where respect kept hope at a distance, where love, fed only by sacrifices, sacrificed itself unceasingly to honour, reinvigorated the characters and the souls of the two sexes; gave more energy to the one, and more elevation to the other; changed men into heroes, and inspired the women with a pride—which was by no means hurtful to virtue.

The

The foregoing account of the origin and progress of chivalry, seems naturally to arise out of the history of the times, and is founded upon the authority of the best early writers. But there are two late writers of so high, and such justly merited reputation, that it would be an injury to the public to omit their opinion, and a crime against genius to alter their expression: they shall therefore speak for themselves, for the women, and for us;—for their sentiments seem only to corroborate ours.

“ The system of chivalry, when
 “ completely formed,” says professor Ferguson, “ proceeded on
 “ a marvellous respect and veneration to the fair sex, on forms
 “ of

“ of combat established, and on a
 “ supposed junction of the heroic
 “ and sanctified character. The
 “ formalities of the duel, and a
 “ kind of judicial challenge, were
 “ known among the ancient Celtic
 “ nations of Europe. The Ger-
 “ mans, even in their native fo-
 “ rests, paid a kind of devotion
 “ to the female sex. The Chris-
 “ tian religion enjoined meekness
 “ and compassion to barbarous
 “ ages. These different principles
 “ combined together, may have
 “ served as the foundation of a
 “ system, in which courage was
 “ directed by religion and love,
 “ and the warlike and gentle were
 “ united together. When the
 “ characters of the hero and the
 “ faint were mixed, the mild spirit
 “ of

“ of Christianity, though often
 “ turned into venom by the bi-
 “ gotry of opposite parties, though
 “ it could not always subdue the
 “ ferocity of the warrior, nor sup-
 “ press the admiration of courage
 “ and force, may have confirmed
 “ the apprehensions of men in what
 “ was to be held meritorious and
 “ splendid in the conduct of their
 “ quarrels.

“ The feudal establishments, by
 “ the high rank to which they ele-
 “ vated certain families, no doubt
 “ greatly favoured this romantic
 “ system. Not only the lustre of
 “ a noble descent, but the stately
 “ castle beset with battlements and
 “ towers, served to inflame the
 “ imagination, and to create a ve-
 I “ neration

“neration for the daughter and
 “the sister of gallant chiefs, whose
 “point of honour it was to be in-
 “accessible and chaste, and who
 “could perceive no merit but that
 “of the high-minded and the
 “brave, nor be approached in any
 “other accents than those of gen-
 “tleness and respect*.”

“From the prevailing spirit of
 “the times,” says professor Millar,
 “the art of war became the study
 “of every one who was desirous
 “of maintaining the character of
 “a gentleman. The youth were
 “early initiated in the profession
 “of arms, and served a sort of ap-
 “prenticeship under persons of

* Essay on the history of Civil Society,
 Part iv. Sect. 4,

“rank

“ rank and experience. The young
 “ squire became in reality the fer-
 “ vant of that leader to whom he
 “ had attached himself, and whose
 “ virtues were set before him as a
 “ model which he proposed to imi-
 “ tate. He was taught to per-
 “ form with ease and dexterity
 “ those exercises which were ei-
 “ ther ornamental or useful, and at
 “ the same time he endeavoured to
 “ acquire those talents and accom-
 “ plishments which were thought
 “ suitable to his profession. He
 “ was taught to look upon it as
 “ his duty to check the insolent,
 “ to restrain the oppressor, to pro-
 “ tect the weak and defenceless;
 “ to behave with frankness and
 “ humanity even to an enemy,
 “ with modesty and politeness to

“ all. According to the profi-
 “ ciency which he had made, he
 “ was proportionably advanced in
 “ rank and character, and was ho-
 “ noured with new titles and
 “ marks of distinction, till at
 “ length he arrived at the dignity
 “ of knighthood; a dignity which
 “ even the greatest potentates were
 “ ambitious of acquiring, as it
 “ was supposed to distinguish a
 “ person who had obtained the
 “ most complete military edu-
 “ cation, and who had attained to
 “ a high degree of eminence in
 “ those particular qualities which
 “ were then universally admired
 “ and respected.

“ The situation of mankind in
 “ those periods had also a manifest
 “ ten-

“ tendency to heighten and im-
 “ prove the passion between the
 “ sexes. It was not to be expected
 “ that those opulent chiefs, who
 “ were so often at variance, and
 “ who maintained a constant op-
 “ position to each other, would al-
 “ low any sort of familiarity to
 “ take place between the members
 “ of their respective families. Re-
 “ tired in their own castles, and
 “ surrounded by their numerous
 “ vassals, they looked upon their
 “ neighbours either as inferior to
 “ them in rank, or as enemies,
 “ against whom they were obliged
 “ to be constantly upon their
 “ guard. They behaved to each
 “ other with that ceremonious ci-
 “ vility which the laws of chivalry
 “ required; but at the same time

“ with that reserve and caution
 “ which a regard to their own
 “ safety made it necessary for them
 “ to observe. The young knight
 “ as he marched to the tourna-
 “ ment saw at a distance the daugh-
 “ ter of the chieftan by whom the
 “ show was exhibited ; and it was
 “ even with difficulty that he could
 “ obtain access to her, in order to
 “ declare the sentiments with
 “ which she had inspired him.
 “ He was entertained by her rela-
 “ tions with that cold respect
 “ which demonstrated their un-
 “ willingness to contract an al-
 “ liance with him. The lady her-
 “ self was taught to assume the
 “ pride of her family, and to think
 “ that no person was worthy of
 “ her affection who did not possess
 “ the

“ the most exalted rank and cha-
 “ racter. To have given way to
 “ a sudden inclination would have
 “ disgraced her for ever in the
 “ opinion of all her kindred; and
 “ it was only by a long course of
 “ attention, and of the most re-
 “ spectful service, that the lover
 “ could hope for any favour from
 “ his mistress.

“ The barbarous state of the
 “ country at that time, and the in-
 “ juries to which the inhabitants,
 “ especially those of the weaker
 “ sex, were frequently exposed,
 “ gave ample scope for the display
 “ of military talents; and the
 “ knight who had nothing to do
 “ at home was encouraged to wan-
 “ der from place to place, and

“ from one court to another, in
 “ quest of adventures; in which
 “ he endeavoured to advance his
 “ reputation in arms, and to re-
 “ commend himself to the fair, of
 “ whom he was enamoured, by
 “ fighting with every person who
 “ was so inconsiderate as to dispute
 “ her unrivalled beauty, virtue,
 “ or personal accomplishments.
 “ Thus, while his thoughts were
 “ constantly fixed upon the same
 “ object, and while his imagina-
 “ tion, inflamed by absence and
 “ repeated disappointments, was
 “ employed in heightening all
 “ those charms by which his de-
 “ fires were continually excited,
 “ his passion was at length wrought
 “ up to the highest pitch; and
 “ uniting with the love of fame,

“ became the ruling and govern-
 “ ing principle of his conduct, and
 “ gave a particular turn and di-
 “ rection to all his sentiments and
 “ opinions.

“ As there were many persons
 “ in the same situation, so they
 “ were naturally inspired with si-
 “ milar sentiments. Rivals to one
 “ another in military glory, they
 “ were often competitors, as
 “ Milton expresseth it, “ to win
 “ her grace whom all commend;”
 “ and the same emulation which
 “ disposed them to aim at pre-emi-
 “ nence in the one respect, excited
 “ them with no less eagerness to
 “ dispute the preference in the
 “ other. Their dispositions and
 “ manner of thinking became fa-
 “ shionable,

“ shionable, and were gradually
 “ diffused by the force of edu-
 “ cation and example. To be in
 “ love was looked upon as one of
 “ the necessary qualifications of a
 “ knight; and he was no less am-
 “ bitious of showing his constancy
 “ and fidelity to his mistress, than
 “ of displaying his military vir-
 “ tues. He assumed the title of
 “ her slave, or servant. By this
 “ he distinguished himself in every
 “ combat in which he was engaged;
 “ and his success was supposed to
 “ redound to her honour, not less
 “ than to his own. If she had be-
 “ stowed upon him a present to
 “ be worn in the field of battle in
 “ token of her regard, it was con-
 “ sidered as a sure pledge of vic-
 “ tory, and as laying upon him
 “ the

“ the strongest obligation to act
 “ in such a manner as would ren-
 “ der him worthy of the favour
 “ which he had received †.

“ The sincere and faithful pas-
 “ sion, the distant sentimental at-
 “ tachment, which commonly oc-
 “ cupied the heart of every war-
 “ rior, and which he professed
 “ upon all occasions, was naturally
 “ productive of the utmost purity
 “ of manners, and of great respect
 “ and veneration for the female-
 “ sex. Persons who made a point
 “ of defending the reputation and
 “ dignity of that particular lady
 “ to whom they were devoted,
 “ became thereby extremely cau-

† Memoires sur l'ancienne chevalrie, par
 M. de la Curne de Ste. Palaye.

“ tious

" tious and delicate; lest, by any
 " insinuation whatever, they should
 " hurt the character of another,
 " and be exposed to the just cen-
 " sure and resentment of those by
 " whom she was protected. A wo-
 " man who deviated so far from
 " the established maxims of the age
 " as to violate the laws of chastity,
 " was indeed deserted by every
 " body, and was therefore univer-
 " sally contemned and insulted.
 " But those who adhered to the
 " strict rules of virtue, and main-
 " tained an unblemished reputa-
 " tion, were treated like beings of
 " a superior order *."

Such was the spirit of chivalry.
 It gave birth to an incredible num-

* Observations concerning the Distinction
 of Ranks in Society, Chap. I.

ber

ber of performances in honour and in praise of women. The verses of the bards, the Italian sonnet, the plaintive romance, the poems of chivalry, the Spanish and French romances *, were so many
monu-

* These compositions, all once so much celebrated, are only calculated to gratify a vain curiosity. They may be compared to the ruins of a Gothic palace: almost all of them have the same foundation; and the praises in the one are as uniform as the apartments in the other. All the women are prodigies of beauty, and miracles of virtue.

The diversity of nations, however, has shewn itself in the manner of painting the same objects. Hence the French compositions have most simplicity, the Italian most depth, the Spanish most imagination—and the reason is obvious. The simplicity of the French writers proceeded from the uncompounded manners of a people still in a state of military subordination, and more accustomed to fight than to think: the depth of the Italian writers was the effect of more cultivated minds,
more

monuments of that kind, composed in the time of a noble barbarism, and of a heroism in which the great and the ridiculous were often blended.

In the courts, in the fields of battle or of tournament, every thing breathed of women:—and the same taste prevailed in letters.

more intercourse with strangers, more diversified manners, and of a crowd of little political interests: the pomp and imagination of the Spanish writers took its rise from an ancient pride, from the activity of souls more sublimed by the sun, and from the mixture of the Moors and Arabs with the native inhabitants of the country; which last circumstance must have had a prodigious influence upon the manners, upon the language, and, by the manner of painting objects, upon the manner of seeing them. For, if the genius of a people forms their language, the characteristic of language must stamp itself upon genius.

One

One did not write, one did not think, but for them. The same man was often both poet and warrior; he sung to his lyre, and encountered with his lance, by turns, for the beauty that he adored.

The times, and the manners of chivalry, by bringing great enterprises, bold adventures, and I know not what of extravagant heroism into fashion, inspired the women with the same taste. The two sexes always imitate each other; their manners and their minds are refined or corrupted, invigorated or dissolved together.

The women, in consequence of the prevailing passion, were now seen in the middle of camps and
of

of armies: they quitted the soft and tender inclinations, and the delicate offices of their own sex, for the courage and the toilsome occupations of ours. During the crusades, animated by the double enthusiasm of religion and of valour, they often performed the most romantic exploits; obtained indulgencies on the field of battle, and died with arms in their hands, by the side of their lovers or of their husbands.

In Europe, the women attacked and defended fortifications; princesses commanded their armies, and obtained victories. Such was the celebrated Joan de Mountfort, disputing for her duchy of Bretagne, and fighting herself. Such
was

was that still more celebrated Margaret of Anjou *, active and intrepid, general and foldier, whose genius supported a long time a feeble husband; which taught him to conquer; which replaced him upon the throne; which twice relieved him from prifon; and, oppreffed by fortune and by rebels, which did not bend, till after ſhe had decided in perfon twelve battles.

The warlike ſpirit among the women, conſiſtent with ages of barbariſm, when every thing is impetuous, becauſe nothing is fixed, and when all exceſs is the exceſs of force, continued in Europe upwards of four hundred

* Queen of England, and wife of Henry VI.

years, shewing itself from time to time, and always in the middle of convulsions, or on the eve of great revolutions.

But there were eras and countries in which that spirit appeared with particular lustre. Such were the displays it made in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Hungary, and in the islands of the Archipelago and the Mediterranean, when they were invaded by the Turks.

Every thing conspired to animate the women of those countries with an exalted courage:—the prevailing spirit of the foregoing ages; the terror which the name of the Turks inspired; the
still

still more dreadful apprehensions of an unknown enemy; the difference of dress, which has a stronger effect than is commonly supposed on the imagination of a people; the difference of religion, which produced a kind of sacred horror; the striking difference of manners; and, above all, the confinement of the female sex; which, though in the East considered only as a civil and political institution, presented to the women of Europe nothing but the frightful ideas of servitude and of a master—the groans of honour, the tears of beauty in the embrace of barbarism, and the double tyranny of love and pride!

The contemplation of these objects accordingly roused in the

hearts of the women a resolute courage to defend themselves, nay sometimes even a courage of enthusiasm, which hurled itself against the enemy; and that courage was augmented, by the promises of a religion, which offered eternal happiness in exchange for the sufferings of a moment.

It is not therefore surprising, that when three beautiful women of the Isle of Cyprus were led prisoners to Selim, to be secluded in the seraglio, one of them preferring death to such a condition, conceived the project of setting fire to the magazine; and, after having communicated her design to the rest, put it in execution;—that, the year following, a city of
Cyprus

Cyprus being besieged by the Turks, the women ran in crowds, mingled themselves with the soldiers, and, fighting gallantly in the breach, were the means of saving their country;—that, under Mahomet II. a girl of the isle of Lemnos, armed with the sword and shield of her father, who had fallen in battle, opposed the Turks, when they had forced a gate, and chased them to the shore;—that, in Hungary, the women distinguished themselves miraculously in a number of sieges and battles against the Turks*;—that, in the two celebrated sieges of Rhodes and Malta, the women se-

* A woman of Transylvania, in different engagements, is said to have killed six janissaries with her own hand.

conding the zeal of the knights, discovered upon all occasions the greatest intrepidity : not only that impetuous and temporary impulse which despises death, but that cool and deliberate fortitude which can support the continued hardships, the toils, and the miseries of war.

That era, and these multiplied examples of courage among the women merit our most serious attention : but only to consider the revolutions of history, to observe, in the islands of the Archipelago, the descendants of the illustrious Greeks, after a revolution of fifteen hundred years, became Christians, and subjects of the republic of Venice, defending their cities

ties and their coasts against the ravages of the conquering Tartars, who carried to the countries of Homer and Plato the religion of an Arabian prophet, is an interesting spectacle, and teems with reflections of every kind.

The Hungarian women, in their encounters with the same Tartars, do not present us with a spectacle less singular. We cannot doubt that it was the double motive of religion and honour, which exalted their courage to such a height : for these are the two principles which in all ages have given birth to the great actions of women.

SECTION II.

*Of the Revival of Letters; and the
Learning of WOMEN.*

WHILE war reigned in Greece, in Hungary, and in the islands of the Mediterranean, which seemed only so many theatres for the illustrious actions of women, another revolution took place in Italy:—the revival of arts and of letters. That era gave a new direction to the ideas and occupations of the female sex. A general thirst after knowledge turned all the world to the study of languages.

There is a time when the symbols of ideas are taken for ideas
them-

themselves. We hope to instruct ourselves by learning words, as some projectors have hoped to enrich themselves by exploring mines. Languages are otherwise so many chains of enigmas, where ideas are hid, and never could provoke our assiduity. Before the exercise of thought, we would know the history of the thoughts of others. This process is perhaps even necessary. In the infancy of life, the senses collect the materials of thinking; in the infancy of letters, the mind treasures up words, to combine them afterwards. In both cases, it is the memory that gives activity to the rest of the intellectual powers.

As words lead to ideas, the ancient philosophy revived with the languages.

languages. Persons of austere minds and obtuse feelings, those who looked upon cold reason to be right reason, who set most value upon a certain logic that restrains, a subtilty that divides, and a vague obscurity which exercises the understanding, and leaves it the merit of determining for itself, and of fixing its ideas, made choice of the philosophy of Aristotle: But people of sensibility and fancy, those who could pardon errors for eloquence, who preferred a sublime and seraphic system of metaphysics to a dry logic, and elegant allusions to sylogistic quibbles; those, in short, who had souls upon which ideas, even chimerically refined, of perfection, of order, and of beauty, made a deep and lively im-

impression, devoted themselves to the philosophy of Plato. ;

The philosophy of Aristotle occupied the universities and the cloisters; the poets, the lovers, the sentimental philosophers, and the ladies, were the disciples of Plato.

Theology, or the art of applying human reasonings to celestial matters, was another kind of knowledge which then employed and engaged the mind: it was fashionable, and it was necessary that it should be so. It was a magazine for the wars of religion, a support for the court of Rome, and a sure road to honour and preferment. A high value was there-

therefore put on that science; and the descendants of the ancient Romans became celebrated by their religious studies, in the country where their ancestors had been so much renowned by their victories.

After the times of conspiracy, of tyranny, and of domestic broils, law and order must have been highly prized. Jurisprudence was therefore cultivated. They had not sufficient knowledge to become legislators; but they studied, they explained, they altered, and they disfigured the Roman laws.

Chivalry now began to decline in Europe; but it left behind it a tincture of romantic gallantry in the
manners,

manners, which communicated itself to the works of imagination.

Many verses were then written, expressive of passions either real or feigned, but always respectful and tender: and as in France, where the dissipated nobility spent their life in war, love was generally painted under the idea of a conquest; in Italy, where another set of ideas prevailed, it was always represented as an adoration or worship.

This confusion of religion and gallantry, of Platonism and poetry, of the study of the languages and of the laws, of the ancient philosophy and the modern theology, formed the general character of the
most

most illustrious men of those times. The same observation may be extended to the most celebrated women.

Never were the women so universally distinguished for profound learning, as in this period. Perhaps as it followed the ages of chivalry, when several women had disputed with men the prize of valour, willing to establish the equality of their sex in all things, they were ambitious to prove that they had as much genius as courage; and to subject, even by their talents, those over whom they reigned by their beauty.

What strikes us most remarkably in that era is, the general spirit.

spirit. We see women preach, and unwind controversy; women publicly support theses; women fill the chairs of philosophy and of law; women harrangue in Latin before the popes; women write in Greek, and read Hebrew; nuns, poetesses; women of quality, divines; and (which happened more than once) young girls perfected in eloquence, with the sweetest features and the softest voice, pathetically exhorting the Holy Father and the Christian princes to declare war against the Turks.

The religious spirit which has animated women in all ages showed itself at this time, but it changed its form. It had made them, by turns, martyrs, apostles, warriors,

riors, and concluded with making them divines and scholars.

An incredible value was still set on the study of languages. In private families, in the cloisters, in the courts, and even on the thrones the same taste reigned. It was but a poor qualification for a woman to read Virgil and Cicero. The mouth of a young Italian, Spanish, or British lady, seemed adorned with a particular grace, when she repeated some Hebrew phrase, or thundered out some verses of Homer.

Poetry, so dear to the imagination, and to susceptible hearts, was embraced with ardour by the women. It was a new and pleasing exertion

exertion of talents, which flattered self-love, and amused the mind. Perhaps too that want which they must have experienced, spite of themselves, and even without knowing it, in a subtile philosophy, an abstract theology, and an empty study of dialects and of sounds, would make them more sensible to the charms of an art, which continually feeds the imagination with its images, and the heart with its sentiments.

I shall particularize a few of the women, who were most celebrated for their learning and talents in that period. It would be easy to double the list.

In the thirteenth century, a young lady of Bologna, devoted
L herself

herself to the study of the Latin language, and of the laws. At the age of twenty-three, she pronounced a funeral oration in Latin in the great church of Bologna; and, to be admired as an orator, she had neither need of indulgence on account of her youth nor of her sex. At the age of twenty-six she took the degree of a doctor of laws, and began publicly to expound the Institutions of Justinian. At the age of thirty, her great reputation raised her to a chair, where she taught the law to a prodigious concourse of scholars from all nations. She joined the charms and accomplishments of a woman to all the knowledge of a man. But such was the power of her eloquence, that her beauty was only

only admired when her tongue was silent.

In the fourteenth century, a like example was exhibited in that city. In the fifteenth century, the same prodigy renewed itself there a third time:—and I cannot help here remarking, that even at this day, in the city of Bologna, there is still a learned chair filled with honour by a woman.

At Venice, in the course of the fourteenth century, two celebrated women attract our notice, the one (Modesta di Pozzo di Zorzi) composed successfully a great number of pieces in verse, serious, comic, heroic, and tender; and some pastorals, which were much admired:

The other, (Cassandra Fidele) who was one of the most learned women of Italy, wrote equally well the three languages of Homer, Virgil, and Dante, and in verse as well as in prose. She possessed all the philosophy of her own, and of the preceding ages; she embellished with graces theology itself; she supported theses with the greatest lustre; she gave public lectures at Padua; she joined to her serious studies the elegant arts, particularly music, and softened her learning still farther by her manners. She received homage from sovereign pontiffs and sovereign princes; and, that she might be singular in all things, she lived upwards of a century.

At

At Milan a lady of the illustrious house of Trivulzio, early in life, delivered a great number of elegant discourses before popes and potentates, in the ancient language of the Romans.

At Verona, in the fifteenth century, Iffotta Nogarolla, acquired so great a reputation by her eloquence that kings were curious to listen, and scholars to attend, to hear, and to see.

At Florence, a nun of the house of Strozzi dispelled the languor and indolence of the cloister by her taste for letters; and, in her solitude, was known over Italy, Germany, and France.

At Naples, Sarrochia composed a celebrated poem upon Scanderbeg; and, in her life-time, was compared to Boyardo and to Tasso.

At Rome we find Victoria Colonna, marchioness of Pescara, who passionately loved and successfully cultivated letters; and who, left in youth to mourn a great and gallant husband, spent the rest of her life in study, and in sorrow, celebrating in her tender verses her long lost hero.

In Spain we see Isabella of Rofera, preach in the great church of Barcelona, come to Rome under Paul III. there convert the Jews by her eloquence, and comment upon the learned Scotus, with

with applause, before the cardinals and archbishops;—Isabella of Cardoua, who understood the Latin, the Greek, and the Hebrew, and who, though possessed of beauty, reputation, and riches, had still the whim of becoming a doctor, and took degrees in divinity ;—Catharine Ribera, who composed a great many Spanish verses, partly devotional and partly amorous;—Aloysia Sigea of Toledo, still more celebrated than the three former, who, besides Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, understood Arabic and Syriac; who wrote a letter in these five languages to pope Paul III. who was afterwards called to the court of Portugal, where she composed several pieces, and died young.

In France we see several women possessed of all the learning of the times, particularly the duchess of Retz, who under Charles IX. was celebrated even in Italy, and who astonished the Polish nobility when they came to demand the duke of Anjou for their king. They beheld with wonder, at court, a young lady so intelligent, and who spoke the ancient languages with no less purity than grace.

In England we meet with the three Seymours, sisters, nieces to a king, and daughters to a protector, all celebrated for their learning, and for their elegant Latin verses, which were translated and repeated all over Europe;—Jane Gray, whose elevation to the throne.

throne was only a step to the scaffold, and who read before her death, in Greek, Plato's Dialogue on the Immortality of the Soul;—nor can we pass by the eldest daughter of the illustrious chancellor, Sir Thomas More, whose learning was almost eclipsed by her virtues; who corresponded in Latin with the great Erasmus, who styled her the ornament of Britain; and who, after she had consoled her father in prison, had rushed through the guards to snatch a last embrace, had obtained the liberty of paying him funeral honours, had purchased his head with a bribe,—accused herself, and loaded with fetters for two crimes—for having watched the head of her father as a relique, and for having
pre-

preserved his books and writings—
 appeared with unconcern before
 her judge; justified herself with
 that eloquence which virtue be-
 stowes on injured merit, com-
 manding admiration and respect,
 and spent the remainder of her
 life in solitude, in sorrow, and in
 study.

We behold in Scotland Mary
 Stuart, heir of that crown, the
 most beautiful woman of her age,
 and one of the most learned, who
 could write and speak six lan-
 guages; who made elegant verses
 in French; and who, when very
 young, delivered an oration in La-
 tin to the court of France, to prove
 that the study of letters is consistent
 with the female character. So
 lovely,

lovely, and so happy an example of the truth which she advanced, could not fail to convince. Mary added to her learning, a delicate taste in the polite arts, particularly music, and adorned the whole with the most feminine and courtly manners.

Several women were even desirous of uniting every species of learning, and some succeeded.

What has since been called *ſociety* was not then indeed so much known. Luxury, and the want of occupation, had not introduced the custom of sitting five or six hours before a glass, to invent fashions. Some use was made of time. Hence that variety of languages,

guages, arts, and sciences, which were acquired by women.

It is but just, however, to observe, that the vanity of being universal is peculiar to the infancy of letters. In childhood, all the world over-rate their powers. It is only by measuring them that we come to know them. The desires themselves were then more easily satisfied than the thirst of learning. People were more anxious to know than to think; and the mind, more active than extended, unable yet to comprehend the secret, or reach the depth of the sciences, ought naturally to have considered them as a sacred deposit in books, which the memory would necessarily impair.

SECTION III.

Of the Books written in Honour of Women, and on the Superiority of the Sexes.

IF the women of those ages were ambitious of arraying themselves in the knowledge of men, the men were at all times ready with their panegyrics to return the compliment to the women. It was the sequel of the general spirit, which carried gallantry into letters as it had introduced it into arms.

Italy in particular was overrun with performances of that kind. The first who gave the example was Boccace. He passionately loved and was beloved by the women; and composed in Latin

tin a treatise in honour of the sex. It is intituled, *Of illustrious Women*. In search of these he wanders through the whole circuit of fable; through the Greek, Roman, and Sacred Histories; and places together Cleopatra and Lucretia, Flora and Portia, Semiramis and Sappho, Athalia and Dido.

Boccace undertook above all things to re-establish the reputation of Dido, in opposition to Virgil. The panegyrist proves against the poet, that the widow of Sichæus was never unfaithful to his memory.

It is humorous to hear Boccace afterwards, in an eloquent and vigorous sequel to that treatise, harangue

travogue against the Christian widows who married again. The author of the Decameron cites St. Paul, and explains the text of that Apostle to a young widow, who excused herself on account of her age for not imitating Dido. This piece, which affords so much pleasantry, is of a serious cast; and, what will scarcely be credited, the moral of Boccace is severe.

The example being now set, a multitude of writers published successively panegyrical catalogues of the illustrious women of all nations.

Joseph Betussi, translated into Italian the Latin treatise of Boccace; and, in the ardour of his

zeal, he enriched it with fifty new articles. Francis Serdonati, thinking the work not yet complete, collected from historians, sacred and profane, barbarous and polished, the names of all the women of eminence which had been omitted, and added to the catalogue a hundred and twenty panegyrics.

But this was not all. Philip de Bergamo, an Augustine monk, published a volume in Latin *Of illustrious Women*. Another performance on the same subject was published by Julius Cesar Capacio, secretary to the city of Naples;—one by Charles Pinto, in Latin, and in verse;—one by Ludovico Domenichi;—one by James Philip Thomassini, bishop of Venice;—and one

one by Bernard Scardioni, a canon of Padua, *Of the illustrious Women of Padua.*

Francis Augustine della Chiefa, bishop of Saluca, wrote a treatise on *The Women famous in Literature*;— Lewis Jacob de St. Charles, a Carmelite, wrote another on *The Women illustrious by their Writings*; and Alexander Van Denbusche, of the Low Countries, wrote one on *The learned Women.*

The celebrated Father le Moine published a volume under the title of *Galerie de Femmes Fortes*; and Brantome wrote *The Lives of illustrious Women.* But it is to be observed that Brantome, a French knight and a courtier, speaks only

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of

of queens and princeſſes. It is in his writings that we find the panegyric of Catharine of Medicis, and of the famous Joan of Naples. In his prolix ſtyle, ſimple and plain, Brantome juſtifies the conduct of theſe two queens. He tells us that the ſecond was without weakneſs, and the firſt free of guilt. He abſolves the one of her incontinence, and the murder of her huſband; and the other of the civil wars, and the maſſacre of St. Bartholomew.

After Brantome Hilario da Coſta, a Minim, publiſhed two volumes in quarto, each volume conſiſting of eight hundred pages, containing, as he tells us, the panegyrics of *all* the women of the fifteenth and

and sixteenth centuries distinguished by their valour, their talents, or their virtues. But the pious ecclesiastic has, in fact, only given us the panegyrics of the *catholic* women of that period. He does not say a word, for example, of queen Elizabeth; but he has made a long and elaborate eulogy on her sister queen Mary, who began her reign with shedding the blood of the amiable Jane Gray; and who, in the five years which she sat on the throne, devoted to the flames on account of religion between six and seven hundred persons, of all ranks, ages, and sexes.

The eulogies of this monkish panegyrist amount to a hundred and seventy. No small num-

ber. But all must yield to the indefatigable Italian, Peter Paul de Ribera, who published in his own language, a work intituled, *The immortal Triumphs and heroic Enterprises of Eight hundred and forty-five Women*. It would certainly be difficult to make a more complete collection.

Besides these large compilations dedicated to the honour of the the whole sex, many of the writers of those times, men of taste and gallantry, addressed panegyrics to individuals, to women who were the living ornaments of their age. This practice was most common in Italy, where every thing conspired to favour it. The world perhaps had never seen, at one time, so many shining princesses
as

as then appeared in that part of Europe. The courts of Naples, of Milan, of Mantua, of Parma, of Florence, and several others, formed so many schools of taste, between which reigned an emulation of glory and of talents. The men distinguished themselves by their address in war, or in love; the women, by their knowledge and accomplishments. Almost every one of these little courts was the residence of some man of high reputation in literature.

In a country, however extensive, which forms only one great kingdom, or state, men of genius are scarce; because there is only one capital, one court, and one centre of luminaries. The distant

provinces have neither the same activity, nor the same taste. But in a country like Italy, divided into a number of states, and where almost every city is a capital; the mind gathers energy, and expands itself amazingly. This was certainly one cause of the superiority of the Italians to the rest of Europe. What was their misfortune in politics, was their glory in arts and in letters.

Those men of wit or genius attached themselves to the celebrated women, the ornaments of the courts where they resided. Some of them, estimating human conditions only by the mind, and conceiving talents to be equal to all things, had even the boldness to enter.

entertain the warmest passions for great princesses *. To them they addressed their glowing sentiments, in verse or in prose. Others, who had imagination without feeling, substituted for passion the sport of fancy; and, mingling with it the Platonic ideas which then prevailed, composed for those princesses, in a metaphysical style, respectful hymns under the notion of panegyrics.

But of all the panegyrics, or collections of panegyrics, in honour of women, in verse, in prose, in sermons, or in sonnets, the most singular, without exception, is that which was published at Venice,

* Boccace at the court of Naples, and Tasso at the court of Ferrara.

in 1555, under the title of *The Temple of the divine Seigniora Joan of Arragon*; erected in honour of her by all the greatest wits, and in all the principal languages, of the world. She was one of the most extraordinary women of the sixteenth century; and, married to a prince of the house of Colonna, was mother to Mark Anthony of Colonna, who signalized himself in the battle of Lepanto, against the Turks.

This ideal temple was erected in consequence of a decree passed at Venice, in the year 1551, in the academy of the *Dubbiosi*. One of the members of that society had conceived the notion of such a deification; but the idea was too happy not to be adopted by the body.

body. They had only one dispute, which divided them much; viz. whether Joan of Arragon should possess alone the honours of the temple, or if they should associate with that divinity the marchioness de Guast her sister, and no less celebrated. But after mature deliberation, and many learned arguments on both sides, it appeared to the academy, that two divinities, two sovereigns, and two women would not much love to dwell together; it was therefore resolved, “ That the marchioness de Guast have separate worship; “ and that Joan of Arrogan, her sister, remain in the sole and exclusive possession of her altars.” They next proceeded to the building of the temple; and the Latin, Greek,

Greek, Italian, French, Spanish, Slavonic, Polonize, Hungarian, Hebrew, Chaldaic, and many other languages, were made use of in the fabrication of that monument;—one of the most extraordinary that ever gallantry raised to beauty.

SECTION IV.

The Subject continued.

THE same spirit which in that era gave birth to so many panegyrics on women, produced a number of books on the merit of the sex in general. The important question of the equality, or superiority, of the sexes was agitated:—and, during five hundred years, there was a kind of literary com-

combination for assigning the pre-eminence to the women.

At the head of that conspiracy was the famous Cornelius Agrippa; who, born at Cologn in 1486, studied all the sciences, embraced all conditions, travelled all countries; who bore arms with distinction, and was afterwards divine, doctor of law, doctor of physic; who commented on the Epistles of St. Paul in England, gave lectures on the Philosopher's Stone at Turin, on divinity at Pavia, and practised physic in Switzerland; who was successively connected with three or four princes and princesses, and was only the more unfortunate; who bore injuries with courage, and without complaining;

plaining; who was twice in fetters; who was always wandering, because always guided by a warm and weak imagination,—because unfit either to be free or to be a slave; because he could neither endure poverty nor dependence; and who, after having excited by turns, or at once, pity, admiration, and hate, died in France in the forty-ninth year of his age, loaded with reputation, and oppressed with misfortunes.

He had published, in 1509, his treatise *Of the Excellence of Women above the Men*. He had then the misfortune to please the famous Margaret of Austria, who governed the Low Countries. It is a pity that little circumstance should have mingled

mingled itself with so gallant a cause. The book is divided into thirty chapters; and, in each chapter, he demonstrates the superiority of the women by theological, physical, historical, cabalistical, and moral proofs. He calls to his assistance scripture and fable, the historians, the poets, the civil and canon laws, cites a great deal more than he reasons, and concludes with protesting, that he had no human motive for writing but a sense of duty; because every man who knows the truth holds it in trust, and consequently silence would be a crime.

The Italians, on reading that work, must have considered it as a robbery, which had been committed

mitted in their territories by a native of Germany. But they soon reimbursed themselves. Cardinal Pompoëia Colonna, Portio, Lando, Domenichi, Maggio, Bernado, Spina, and a great many others, all wrote on the perfection of women.

But the most singular work on the subject is that of Ruscelli. It appeared at Venice in 1552. Ruscelli came after all the rest; and dissatisfied, as he says, with the manner in which they had supported a cause so evident, he conceived new proofs, so positive that henceforth there could not be the possibility of a doubt. After having copied, criticised, and commented upon Agrippa, he throws in some sublime speculations of his own,

own, and endeavours to prove, that the contemplation of beauty alone can render man happy on earth, and raise him to the contemplation of the divinity.

Such is the scope of Ruscelli's composition. But the effect of his reasoning is destroyed by the confused impression which is made on the mind of the reader, by the mixture of divinity and Platonism; by blending through the whole the name of God and of woman; by placing Moses by the side of Petrarch and of Dante; and by giving in the same page, and even in the same period, quotations from Boccace and from St. Augustine, from Homer and from St. John.

Nothing

Nothing, in my opinion, can exhibit a truer picture than this performance does of the spirit of the sixteenth century, particularly in Italy; where the same man was or would be, in good earnest, a lover, a devotee, a christian, a pagan, a divine, and a philosopher. Perhaps even that extravagant combination of ideas and of characters must necessarily be found in a country, where we often meet with the ruins of a temple of Jupiter in the neighbourhood of a church, a statue of St. Peter upon a column of Trajan, and a Madona beside an Apollo.

It appears that even after Ruscelli had written there were still infidels to persuade, and that the

work of conversion was not thought complete; for we find a great many future performances published in Italy, in France, and in Spain, on the same subject.

In 1593, a celebrated Venetian, already mentioned, *Modesta di Pozzo di Zorzi*, maintained the superiority of her sex to ours. Her performance had great success: and, unfortunately for her, what perhaps added to its celebrity was, that one might commend without jealousy. She died just as it was published. The men, however, always viewed with pleasure those kind of compositions by women. Pride, which construes every thing to its own advantage, regarded as so many proofs of its pre-eminence,

the very efforts which were made to demonstrate its inferiority.

Lucretia Marinella, another Venetian lady, supported the same cause. Her performance is intituled, *The Dignity and Excellence of Women, with the Faults and Imperfections of Men*. The men, at least, will not be accused of the fault of injustice to her; for she had all the success which beauty can give to genius.

In 1628, yet another Italian performance appeared upon *The Dignity of Women*. The author of that book was one Christopher Bronzini. The work is in dialogue, and divided by Days. We may judge by the extent of his plan how rich the subject appeared to him:
his

his division is twenty-four Days. The eighth Day, in which nothing is treated of but marriage, occupies upwards of two hundred pages. Bronzini, in praising the women, has assigned them no rank, and has left the dispute of the sexes undecided.

But, in 1650, a book appeared, in which the controversy was treated very prettily. The title of the piece was, *Woman better than Man; a Paradox; by James del Pozzo*. It seems doubtful how far the women would be flattered with the word Paradox.

In Spain, in the sixteenth century, John Spinosa wrote a dialogue in praise of women. We may believe that he extolled them

with all the imagination of his country, and with all the majesty of his language.

The French women were not less zealous than the Italian to support the honour of their sex. Margaret queen of Navarre, and first wife to Henry IV. by turns devout and gay, and more celebrated for the sprightliness of her wit than the purity of her manners, undertook to prove, in a piece in the form of a letter, *that Woman is much superior to Man.*

Mademoiselle de Gournay, who deserved to be adopted by Montaigne, wrote also upon her sex ; but, more modest, or more timid, she confined her pretensions, and was contented with equality. That
modesty

modesty however did not hinder Mary Schurman,—born at Cologne, and who in her life-time had a prodigious reputation,—to say, after she had read M. de Gournay's book in honour of her sex, “ I “ neither would nor dare approve “ all that is contained in this performance.” Yet, if any woman ever had a right to aspire at the superiority, it was perhaps that lady. She was a painter, musician, graver, sculptor, philosopher, geometrician, divine, and understood and spoke nine different languages.

In 1643, a piece appeared at Paris under this title: *The Generous Woman; who shews that her Sex is more noble, more patriotic, more brave, more learned, more virtuous, and more æconomical than that of Man.*

In

In 1665, another lady published at Paris a book intituled, *The illustrious Dames*; where, by good and strong Reasons, it is proved, that the *Women surpass the Men*.

In 1673, a performance appeared intituled, *The Equality of the two Sexes: Discourses philosophical and moral, in which are shewn the Importance of divesting ourselves of Prejudices*.

In 1675, the Author of the last-mentioned piece refuted himself, in a treatise on *The Excellency of Men, against the Equality of the Sexes*. But he reasons feebly, as if afraid of refuting himself, and overturning his former system.

A lady of Languedoc, in the same century, was willing to repossess

sefs herself of the superiority, and endeavoured to establish it by *good* and *sure* reasons. In short, that opinion, or that controversy, produced a kind of war among writers otherwise obscure, and gave birth to Dissertations, to Answers, and to Replies, now equally unknown: and it is but just to remark, that few of them deserve to be read, and that the question has not been properly treated in any of them. Authority is always substituted for argument. Such pedants should be told, that twenty citations will not make a reason.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.